

The "Big Four" Building
220-226 "K" Street
Sacramento, Sacramento County
California

HABS No. CAL-1170

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
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THE BIG FOUR BUILDING

Sacramento, Sacramento County, California

ADDRESS: Nos. 220-226 "K" Street,
between Second and Third Streets

OCCUPANT: Various Tenants

USE: Stores, Bar and Cafe, Hotel (second floor)

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Originally three separate buildings erected in 1851-1852. The lower floor was occupied by merchants, three of whom later were associated with the founding of the first transcontinental railway linking California with the East. The second floor of these structures served as the first offices of the Central Pacific Railway, 1862-1873.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Big Four Building was recommended for classification as having Exceptional Value under Subtheme: "Transportation and Communication" of Theme XV, Westward Expansion, National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, conducted by the National Park Service in 1960. Subsequently the site was given a National Landmark status.

Constructed originally as three separate structures to house several wholesale and retail businesses in the section of town adjacent to the waterfront known as the Old Sacramento area or commercial quarter. The present street numbers, 220, 222, 224 and 226 "K" Street, dates from 1880 when a city-wide reform in numbering took

place. Prior to that date these buildings were numbered 52, 54, 56 and 58 "K" Street.

The Stanford Building, numbers 224 and 226 (formerly numbers 56 and 58), was erected by Josiah Stanford. He purchased the lot and replaced the existing frame building with a two-story brick building in 1851 or early 1852. The building survived the great fire of November 2, 1852, that destroyed the adjacent structures. The second floor of the building was known as Stanford Hall and was used for political and social gatherings. After the 1852 fire it was the only community hall available and was the meeting place of both the Masons and Odd Fellows.

Leland Stanford joined his brother in the general merchandising business and became the manager of the Sacramento store. Leland Stanford, in association with three other local merchants, Collis P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins and Charles Crocker, formed the "Big Four" that organized and later directed the Central Pacific Railway.

In 1862 Stanford Hall was divided into six rooms to accommodate the first offices of the Central Pacific Railway. An article in the Sacramento Union of September 15, 1862 stated that Governor Leland Stanford had given instructions to W. P. Knox to begin to fix-up commodious offices for use of the company. Later, when the railroad business grew, a door was cut through the wall into the adjoining Huntington & Hopkins buildings, numbers 54 and 52 "K" Street. The Stanford building was purchased by the Huntington & Hopkins & Company in 1878 to accommodate their expanded hardware business.

Huntington & Hopkins Building, No. 222 "K" Street (formerly No. 54 "K" Street) was erected in late 1851 or early 1852. The building was completely destroyed in the fire of November 2, 1852 and rebuilt in late 1852. Collis P. Huntington operated a thriving wholesale business in miners' supplies, hardware, etc., on the ground floor. Huntington had several business partners from the time of establishing the Huntington store in 1849 to the time Mark Hopkins joined the business in May 1, 1855.

C. P. Huntington and his bride occupied the second floor of No. 54 as living quarters. Huntington's dwelling was still listed at No. 54 "K" Street in the City Directory of 1856.

The Huntington & Hopkins business had increased in volume and in 1861 they purchased the adjacent two-story building at No. 52 "K" Street (now No. 220). A photograph of the Huntington & Hopkins Hardware Store, as it appeared in 1861-1877, shows each of the two

separate structures having a number "54" painted in large figures at the top of the second floor above the firm name, a fact that mislead many historians in establishing true building identity.

By 1878 Stanford had sold the building at Nos. 54 and 58 to Huntington & Hopkins & Company. The new enlarged hardware store now combined the original Stanford, Huntington & Hopkins building and the Miller building, Nos. 52, 54, 56 and 58 into one structure having a frontage on the "K" Street of 82 feet. The illustration of 1880 shows the extensive remodeling of the "K" Street frontage that has only the street number of "54" painted on the building.

Miller Building, No. 220 "K" Street (formerly No. 52) was originally erected as early as March 1851 by the P. J. Brown & Company, wholesale merchants. The building was completely destroyed by the fire of 1852 and rebuilt in late 1852. The structure housed the firm of G. B. Gammons & Company by February 1853, and the Morgan Miller and Company by December 1855. Marshall Hubbard owned the property from 1858 to 1860. Huntington & Hopkins & Company first paid taxes on the building at No. 52 "K" Street in 1861.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Little evidence remains today of the original three separate two-story brick structures or of the extensive remodeling of these buildings into a combined frontage as illustrated in 1880. Only the iron work of the first story facade of Nos. 224 and 226 remains the same as the iron work of the original Stanford Store before 1878. The curved lintels of the first floor window and door openings differ from the horizontal lintels of the two adjacent structures at No. 220 and 222 (formerly 52 and 54 "K" Street). The reader is referred to the set of measured drawings to be housed in the Library of Congress, having the HABS No. CAL-1170. Sheets No. 6 and 7 show detailed drawings of the one remaining, original doorway, and the iron column covers mentioned.

Extensive changes over the period of years have altered both the exterior and the interior space. Little, if any, remains of the original partitions or space use of the buildings.

It is important to note that these three buildings obviously were elevated or jacked up to meet the new street level. The great flood of January 1861 washed away many of the foundations of buildings in the commercial district, including the newly laid foundations of the

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State capital buildings, then under construction. Since the existing streets were only nine feet above sea level, flooding of this district was rather common. Street levels (but not the alley levels) were raised prior to 1865, to prevent future damage to the city.

Examination of present buildings in the Old Sacramento area reveals that buildings were either raised or, as in the case of the building at No. 50 "K" Street, the ground floor became the basement level. Such was the fate of the Brannon Buildings on Front Street, above "K" Street. An article in the Sacramento Union of January 7, 1865 states that: "S. Brannan made a contract yesterday with G. J. Cross to raise the roofs of his five brick stores on Front Street above K, now but one story high and considerably below the present grade of the street. Roofs will be raised high enough to make room for a 15 foot story above the high grade of the street." Many original store fronts bearing the old street numbers can be seen in the area beneath the present elevated sidewalks. Noted in the first floor framing of the Stanford Building were headers directly above present girders that could have been the location of the "jacks" used to elevate the structure.

In summary the Big Four Building offers little in the way of architectural interest but is of importance historically as being the site of early planning of the building of the first transcontinental railway crossing the Sierras. The engineer who prepared this assumed impossible route was Theodore D. Judah. It was he who interested the Sacramento merchants, Stanford, Huntington, Hopkins and Crocker to organize the Central Pacific Railway. Judah received little credit for his efforts in promoting the proposed railway linking California with the East.

The Big Four Building is scheduled for demolition or removal to make way for a new freeway.

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3. Historic Spots in California, by Hoover and Rensch, Publ. by Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 3rd Printing January 1958.
4. Architectural Legacy of Sacramento, A Study of 19th Century Style, by Baird, Joseph Armstrong, Jr., California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, September 1960.
5. The Big Four, by Oscar Lewis, Publ. by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1938.

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1. Carroll D. Hall, Monument Supervisor, Sutter's Fort, State Historical Monument.
2. Hero Eugene Rensch, Research Historian
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